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# Enhancing Young Children's Access to Early Childhood Education and Care in Tanzania

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.71265>

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## Abstract

This chapter draws on the current situation of limited access of young children to early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings in Tanzania. It offers information and evidence on early childhood education and care (ECEC) from an international perspective to those who are, directly or indirectly, involved with young children and their families. Basically, early childhood education and care in Tanzania is still unsatisfactory. Many children have no access to early childhood settings for various reasons including: lack of parents' awareness on the importance of early investment in education, lack of support from the government, low socio-economic status of parents, gender discrimination, and traditional norms and cultural values. To improve the situation, there is need for a forging of partnership between the government, parents, and the community. Government policy-makers have to set clear policies regarding how quality early childhood education and care can be equitably funded and conducted throughout the country.

**Keywords:** access in preschool settings, early childhood education and care, early investment, parents and community involvement, preschool teachers, socio-economic status

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## 1. Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to offer information and evidence on early childhood education and care (ECEC) from an international perspective to those who are, directly or indirectly, involved with young children and their families. Ideological and historical context can explain how a system of ECEC develops within a country, and an understanding of the ECEC system and its characteristics can describe how effects upon children can occur. The chapter draws on the current situation of limited access of young children to early childhood

education and care settings in Tanzania. Importantly, it explains how young children access to early childhood education focusing on Tanzanian context.

Early education is the foundation for all formal education worldwide. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is conceptualised as incorporating both education and care, which has sometimes been called *educare* [1–3]. However, education and care in many countries, including African countries such as Tanzania, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Zambia, and South Africa has been institutionalised into separate administrative arrangements for care and education [1, 4]. Such separation of administrative arrangements runs counter to a holistic view of learning and development and that education and care should be integrated, with the child and family as the central focus. For example, New Zealand was one of the first countries in the world to integrate all early childhood services under an educational administration, reflecting that education and care cannot be separated and that quality services incorporate both [5]. Also it is important to realise that childcare is diverse, and do not make the mistake, which is too common amongst politicians, of regarding day care for under-ones as basically the same issue as kindergarten for 3–4-year olds. Some forms of ECEC have explicit educational aims and are usually targeted on young children from 3 years upwards, which are nursery schools and kindergartens [2]. There is an overlap between the care and education-oriented divisions with the distinction becoming increasingly blurred, with recognition of the significance of learning in the first 3 years for longer term development.

For many countries worldwide, childcare has traditionally been considered the private problem of families, which often gives rise to resentment to increased childcare provision. However, progressively it is taken for granted that childcare is here to stay given the social changes occurring in developed and developing countries. In industrialised societies, ECEC is now being recognised as part of the infrastructure for economic development [2], since childcare, whether or not accommodates the educational elements, is a necessity for modern societies with women as central to the workforce. The diversity in ECEC provision across countries reflects.

However, in Tanzanian context, parents and community at large have negative attitude in regard to early investment, they perceive investing in early years like a waste of money [6, 7]. In this regard, their complains include the notion that young children who have access to the ECEC centre just go there to take porridge, sing songs and play and their parents pay for these. Parents argue that at that early age parents and the community should serve as the teachers of young children, until the children grow to the primary school age.

Views of children as a distinct social group with rights have developed over time. Pence et al. [8] argue that for much of the twentieth century and throughout most of the world, African countries included, ECEC was largely invisible as a state-policy concern. Young children, in the eyes of most states, were an appendage of their parents, or embedded in the larger family structure [8], and were treated as objects to be shaped and socialised, seen as just properties of their families, and as incomplete human beings [3, 9]. The child as an individual social entity was largely unrecognised [10]. This portrayal contrasts with an understanding that children are persons who, while thriving in conducive, warm, and supportive environments, are “active participants in their social worlds and have a unique part to play in their own development” [5, p. 15].

## 2. Value of ECEC and rationale for government investment

This section discusses two main arguments as to why ECEC is regarded as valuable and why governments should invest in it. The arguments are concerned with the benefits of early investment for children's learning and development, society and the economy, and social changes.

### 2.1. Benefits of early investment

Children's participation in good quality ECEC has benefits for the child's learning and development at the time of attendance and throughout their life [11, 12]. There is a growing recognition that participation in ECEC from 2 or 3 years before starting school is beneficial for all children and particularly for children from low-income and disadvantaged groups [12, 13].

Achievement or breakdown at this early education stage lays the foundation for success or failure in school, which in turn leads to achievements or breakdown in post-school learning [14–16]. A study by [17] reports that the early years (ages 0–6) are the time for brain development; therefore quality ECEC programmes are a key societal as well as personal imperative. Further, [17] emphasise that a child's environment and experiences start in *utero* and not only affect brain development, but also physical and mental health, learning and behaviour for a life time. McCain and Mustard [18] also support the view that development of the brain in the early years of life, particularly the 0–3-year olds, establishes the foundation of competence and coping skills for the later stages of life. This view is argued by Smith et al. [13] who state, "there are links between early sensory stimulation and the activation of the arousal system, chaotic environments can produce abnormal reactions to later stress, while nurturing sensitive environments allow children to respond more adaptively" (p. 28). Smith et al. [13] further emphasise, "young children need to be protected from lack of stimulation, over stimulation or aversive stimulation in the early years" (p. 28).

Ref. [9] asserts that investment in children 0–8 years is important because it gives "a good start in life involving a nurturing, caring, and safe environment" (p. 136) to children who are the future hope of any society and nation. Evidence suggests that providing quality ECEC services can also improve the economic well-being of countries [13, 19]. It is theorised in the literature that children who benefit from early education, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are more likely to succeed in primary schools [12, 20]. Longitudinal studies have also found that children who benefit from a good primary education are more likely to succeed in secondary schools and tertiary education [12].

In support of early investment in young children, [17] report that participation in good quality early interventions leads to increased earnings in later life and stimulates positive social relationships. Many researchers have noted that improving human development in the early years is definitely a way to break out of poverty because early investment has a very high economic rate of benefits [11, 15, 17].

ECEC is an essential part of the education system worldwide [16, 21]. Many researchers assert that learning starts from birth continues until formal education begins, and continues all the way through life [22]. Early learning is the basis for future learning and early success results in later success, just as early failure can result in later failure [22, 23]. Therefore, investing in good quality ECEC provision from an early age can be seen as an effective means of attaining developmental targets, such as earnings in later life, cost savings, good life for children and families, and breaking cycles of disadvantage [11, 13]. One aim of ECEC has been described as building a bridge from early year's education to compulsory schooling [24]. ECEC is meant to support parents in the education of their children and also to address any apparent developmental delays.

In summary, current studies of good quality ECEC have shown notable success in promoting children's learning and development and indicate that the early years are important for early learning [15, 25]. International evidence shows that investing in good quality ECEC can bring cost savings and benefits to governments and economies [25], as well as to children and families.

## **2.2. Social changes**

The second main reason for ECEC provision is claimed to be in response to social changes. OECD [26] advocates an increase in women's labour market involvement, the need to reconcile work and family duties on a more equitable basis, and the need to address issues of child poverty and educational disadvantage. This is because economic prosperity depends on maintaining high employment levels including maternal employment, and this has been a key driver of government interest in expanding ECEC. In other words, ECEC enables mothers of young children to engage in the labour market with consequent positive impacts on the economy and on countries' policies [2, 12]. However, [3] argue that the availability of early education and child care on the one hand can encourage women to attend to paid jobs, but on the other hand can have some negative effects for the well-being of family members because mothers may have multiple roles, that is, work and child care responsibilities.

Furthermore, writers report that developed countries have achieved high levels of quality in ECEC services combined with high rates of maternal employment [26, 27], whereas developing countries, such as Tanzania, despite showing a significant increase in women's employment, have not shown much advance in ECEC services [1]. Hence ECEC services do not automatically develop when there is a clear need for them. Other factors such as the ideology and politics arising from a country's history and culture are also important [9, 28].

## **3. The situation of ECEC in African countries**

The situation of ECEC in many African countries is one of the developments due to various reasons. The level of training of staff is poor and many staffs have no training [1, 29]. Access is limited. There are few institutions which care for children aged 0–6 years and most ECEC



centres for 3 and 6 years old are found only in urban areas and are of poor quality [28, 30]. Similarly, the ECEC curricula are not helpful for young children, because of their poor consideration of children's needs and interests. Support from international organisations is mainly used for ECEC of children aged 3 years and above [1], so 0–3 year provision is particularly neglected.

A large number of disadvantaged families have found it difficult to get access to ECEC in African countries [1, 9]. Further, it is argued that there are challenges in developing ECEC programmes in under-resourced countries in Africa [9, 17, 31]. Young and Mustard [17, p. 73] assert, "the situation for Africa's children is alarming" showing examples of limited resources in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Zambia, and Senegal. It has been argued that many African countries are looking closely at what services might be developed, at what cost, and for what expected benefits for children immediately prior to their entry into primary school [4].

### **3.1. The current situation of ECEC in Tanzania**

Tanzania got its independence from British protectorate in 1961. After independence, Tanzania had to reform its education system in order to match the education provision with the needs of its people. But the government found it too expensive to invest in ECEC due to the country's low and unstable economic status [32]. So the government opened up doors to private institutions to run ECEC, while it concentrated on investing in primary, secondary, and higher levels of education [33]. Since independence, Tanzania has had a philosophy of Education for Self Reliance (ESR) [34]. This made it essential to enrol children in basic education in order for them to become productive members of society by taking on manual work in the community for self-sufficiency after completion of their primary education. The government's intention was that after having stabilised basic education it would turn back to ECEC matters [31]. ECEC matters progressed slowly with untrained teachers who had no formalised curriculum. Teachers just taught using their own experiences which were not founded in the ECEC area and they had guidelines which were also not prepared by ECEC experts [35]. This situation continued until the 1990s when the international policy statements about children's rights were declared [36].

As a response to international and national policies advocating the importance of education for young children as a right, the Tanzanian government also adopted this agenda. The government of Tanzania was one of the first in Africa to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) 1989 in 1991, as well as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child [37]. The government also supports the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All (EFA) and the Dakar Framework for Action [38, 39], both of which consider ECEC as a basic right as well as millennium development goals (MDGS) of the 2000s. The World Conference on Education for All held in 1990 at Jomtien, Thailand, marked a new start in the global quest to universalize basic education and eradicate illiteracy. Through the Jomtien Declaration and the Framework for Action, commitments were made and directions set for a decade of large-scale and sustained efforts [38].

The consensus reached at the 1990 World Summit by the countries present at this conference set a target for all children to be enrolled in primary education by the year 2015 [40]. But this is yet to happen in Tanzania.

The situation of children in Tanzania is still not satisfactory, and children are disadvantaged due to the inadequacy of social services, such as schools, health facilities, and environmental services [41]. In Tanzania 200,000 children under 5 years die each year and more than 2 million children are affected with malnutrition number [33, 41] from a total current population is 47.8 million [42]. Furthermore, a study by [33] reported that the few ECEC settings observed had limited resources. Children have no access to education due to high poverty, poor health services, and likewise, street children, pastoralist families (Maasai family) have no permanent settlement so it becomes difficult for them to get access to education [43]. These are just some of the many issues hindering children from getting opportunities to participate in ECEC.

### **3.2. The provision of funds from the government to preschools**

The government normally gets funds from internal and external sources for various uses. External sources are like international agencies such as the World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF. All funds, whether internal or external, are collected in one container and thereafter distributed to various sectors. Therefore, the Ministry of Education in Tanzania also gets funds from the government to run educational matters. Funds from various sources, whether internal or external sources are collected in one container, thereafter the amount is allocated to various sectors according to the requirement and the availability of funds. However, the Ministry of Education did not allocate funds for operating preschools. For example, it is argued that the government through the Ministry of Education should supply Quota Budget Code to preschool education. Quota Budget Code refers to the system of supplying grants to schools, teacher education, and higher institutions in a quarterly basis.

In turn, the implementation is problematic; the allocation of funds for the preschool education through Quota Budget Code is not yet implemented. Preschool education does not have its own budget. Instead the funds are allocated to primary school unit hoping that if any extra could support preschool education, however, in reality even the amount allocated for primary schools is not enough to handle primary education matters [6, 36]. Preschool education is therefore funded through parents and community donations organised by local committees. It is apparent that the situation of ECEC services is not improving due to government's lack of commitment to this type of education.

For that matter, the situation in early childhood education and care settings in Tanzania is not conducive for children to learn various knowledge and skills. For instance, building facilities are poor and not completed and the local community seemed unable to manage the provision of quality teaching and learning resources, let alone donation in monetary form. Therefore, the government policy-makers need to set clear policies regarding how ECEC could be funded and conducted. These facilities were supposed to be provided by the government through the national policy guidelines on how ECEC could be funded and conducted. However, this is not the case.

Briefly, it is imperative that ECEC is recognised within education as the foundation for life-long learning [2, 12]. Numerous countries worldwide recognise that education in the early years lays down the basis for all levels of education. In developing countries, like Tanzania, the situation of education for young children is not satisfactory. There are large numbers of children who do not have access to ECEC settings for a number of reasons such as lack of support from the government, lack of awareness of parents of the importance of early investment, low socio-economic status of parents, traditional norms and cultural values, and gender discrimination. It is recognised by the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) and the Framework for Action that education is a child's right [38, 39], and it needs to be valued from early years. It is therefore of the highest priority that access to early childhood education and care services is enabled for all young children. It is within these early years that young children present the greatest ability to learn and develop. All efforts to develop education from the early years onwards should pay consideration to access, quality provision, and relevance to enable children to reach their full potential.

#### **4. Qualifications of teachers and professional development**

A key factor influencing the enactment of curricula is that of teacher qualifications, teacher education, and professional development. In Tanzania, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) is responsible for initial teacher education (ITE) and professional development. Tanzania's Education and Training Policy (ETP) insists that the qualification of teachers and their ability to perform well in the class is a key factor in improving the quality education. However, the ETP is silent about the qualifications of ECEC teachers and as a result the implementation of this policy remains in question [40]. In some areas where children have access to early education settings, unqualified teachers work with young children without having knowledge and skill in relation to ECEC matters. Children are taught by retired teachers and volunteers on contractual bases and in other areas they are taught by primary school teachers who also teach primary school pupils as a result they had a heavy workload which reduce their efficiency. But in both circumstances, no professional development is taking place in order to improve the teaching and learning situation.

The concern of poor human resources is important, because qualified teachers with pedagogical skills to work with young children are reflected in positive learning outcomes. The government is responsible for locating qualified teachers as well as professional development; however, this appears not to be happening. A main argument here is that having primary teachers in the preschool resulted in inappropriate teaching styles; they lack the pedagogical skills for teaching young children, as they are not trained to teach young children, and a theoretical understanding of play-based learning is lacking. Literature shows that ECEC teachers do not get opportunities to attend any professional development for teaching a preschool class [30, 33]. As stated by [44], ECEC is a unique area and requires special preparation for ECEC teachers, and ECEC teacher education has a positive impact on teachers and teaching. Early childhood teacher education is envisaged as addressing both present issues and aspirations.



A numerous literature show that qualified teachers rich in pedagogical skills to work with young children can demonstrate social interactions, relationships and activities that promote learning and development [12, 13, 19]. Hence, spontaneous and reciprocal interactions within the context of caring relationships are vital components of ECEC. Enabling environments provide “conditions for the kind of teaching and learning that lead to quality outcomes for children, especially qualified staff, low child: adult ratios, small group size, and staff professional development opportunities” [11, p. 18]. Qualified teachers are expected to draw on their knowledge and experience of working with young children and pedagogy to offer the kinds of cognitive and non-cognitive skills that are linked with gains for children.

However, the situation indicates that the supply of qualified ECEC teachers is grossly inadequate. The government needs to support more teacher education in ECEC and the school inspectorate to supervise the standards and regulations of preschool education. There is also a need for the government to monitor and control preschool education curriculum enactment and pedagogy, including initial teacher education, qualifications, and certification. The lack of initial teacher education and professional development for preschool teachers in Tanzania, results in children who are not well guided due to the teachers’ lack of pedagogical skills.

## **5. Parents and community involvement in early childhood education and care**

Parent and community involvement in children’s educational experiences plays a significant role in shaping children’s social development, cultural values, and practices [45]. The involvement of parents as partners in ECEC settings provides an ongoing system which can reinforce the effects of the programme while it is in process, and helps to sustain them after the programme ends. The involvement of the parents and community as active participants is critical to the success of an ECEC intervention programme [45, 46]. When parents collaborate with teachers in their children’s learning, they also become experts. Parental involvement is thus both a facilitator and a preserver, and the aim of intervention is neither for the parent nor the child on their own, but the parent-child system. It is argued that when parents participate at school and actively support and encourage learning at home, their children are more successful at all levels of education regardless of the parents’ educational background or social class [45].

Parental participation should be viewed as a continuous process from home environments up to preschool programmes. Parents’ communications with the early childhood centre have educational significance for the child and also for both parents and teachers [2], who learn more about the child from different perspectives and contexts. A study by [45] reports that collaboration between teachers and parents offers the child security and acceptance, and helps the parents to understand more about the child’s areas of development, psycho-physical abilities [9, 46] and where additional stimulation is needed on the part of the teachers or parents.

Furthermore, parents are also involved in school-based activities. For example, they participate in school meetings, school committees, especially at community-managed schools [46];

they do manual labour on the school infrastructure, and help to prepare daily meals or snacks at school [45]. Karwowska-Struczyk [47] in Poland articulates that during parent meetings, it is common for the teacher to inform parents what children learn and do and what kind of curriculum activities the teacher proposes for the children. Then parents are free to ask what they would like their children to learn in the ECEC settings.

Parent's engagement in children's education is progressively viewed as an essential support to children's early learning, care, and education programmes. Effective parent engagement during the period from preschool through the early grades is a key contributor to children's positive intellectual, socio-emotional skills outcomes, and healthy development [46, 47]. The involvement of parents in preschools takes various forms that can be broadly classified as, home-based parent involvement, for example, parent-child reading and playing various games with children that offer learning enrichment; or community activities, such as volunteer work in building classrooms or renovations, taking children to the library and/or to study tours. School-based parent involvement could be volunteering in a child care or early grades classroom or serving on school committees as well as parent meetings [45].

Parents' commitment in a variety of other home and community activities has also been connected to young children's learning. Also, in the home environment parents' engagement can include playing alphabet games, helping children with art activities, and telling stories. A number of studies show that parent warmth and responsiveness to children's interests and needs are vital dimensions of parent engagement that promote children's learning [45]. Parents' responsiveness can be observed through home-based activities such as parent-child book reading and the use of praise and encouragement [2, 46]. Therefore, one way that parent nurturance may promote learning is by helping children acquire self-regulation skills that enable them to manage their socio-emotions and behaviour.

### **5.1. Socio-economic status of parents**

The situation of ECEC in Tanzania is alarming. Children from families with low socio-economic status and low-income backgrounds are less likely to participate in ECEC services. The dire situation of people especially in rural area and their failure to enrol their children in ECEC centres has also been found by various writers in other developing countries. For example, [48, 49] found that in rural India, a large number of the households are involved in agricultural and associated activities, and their children are likely to take up this occupation at an early age with or without schooling.

A large number of parents/guardians are not enrolling their children in preschools. Amongst other reasons for this is their low socio-economic status and lack of financial support from the government.

This is to say not all parents could afford the continuous demand of school contributions and as a consequence, their children may become involved in child labour, truancy, street children, crimes, and delinquency. Low socio-economic status contributes to poverty, some parents find someone in the community, who seems to be in a good position and requests him to support the family on the promise that he be able to marry their girl child after she

has reached a certain age. But that marriage can take place even before her maturity. In the same way, other parents hide their children until they reach school age due to lack of money to pay for ECEC settings. Early marriage is also critiqued by [50] in Kenya, who found that some small girls get married at or before adolescence and begin bearing children as soon as they can. Furthermore, findings from the study conducted by [6] observed that due to poverty, the priority for education was for boys and not a girl child, girls having to remain at home waiting to get married even at a young age. This finding is supported by [51] who found that maternal wage rates and costs of ECEC centres affect children's enrolment in various settings; an increase in mothers' wages raises school participation of boys, but lowers that of girls, indicating that girls might substitute for mothers in housework and caring for small children [26].

Given the low socio-economic status of many citizens of Tanzania, it is argued that changes need to be made in order to raise the standard of living of the people. Tanzania is a blessed country with a variety of natural resources including areas of land, mountains, forests, national parks/wildlife, rivers, lakes, coastal zone, fisheries, minerals, coal and natural gas; still the country has failed to utilise the resources in order to support ECEC provision [52]. Many people have low income and no kind of support they get from the government in terms of education for their children. Hence, they fail to enrol their children in the ECEC settings. The Tanzanian government could locate agricultural extension officers in rural areas to give advice on farming inputs and the kind of crops to grow in relation to the weather. This view is supported by [53] who reports that low increases in rural sector productivity are mainly due to inadequate infrastructure investment. The finding is also closely related to that of [54] who reports that in rural areas people live in poverty, they cannot access good social services such as education, clean water, health services, and nutrition.

## **5.2. Degree of enrolment of young children to ECEC settings**

In Tanzanian context, ECEC is conducted into separate administrative arrangements for care and education as was explained earlier. So, preschool education is a formal school system for children aged 4–5 years. Preschool cycle lasts for 1 year with no examinations for promotion purpose. However, lack of awareness of parents of the importance of preschool education is observed as another reason for parents not sending their children to preschool settings. Based on the lack of awareness and poverty, children do not attend schools as results children look for child labour and for girls end up with early pregnancies. It is also argued that in African context, Tanzanian in particular, a traditional child-rearing system contributes many parents/guardians not enrolling their children in preschool settings [9, 10]. Young brothers and sisters who are also small used to take care of their young children when parents attended individual farms or community activities. African governments need to raise public awareness about the value of preschool education. Low rates of enrolment in preschool education is also explained by [55] in Kenya who found that a lack of public awareness on the value of ECEC for children's learning and development and a lack of trust of strangers taking care of their children in ECEC settings were amongst the critical issues.

Enrolment of 5-year olds 2016	Gross enrolment rate (GER)			Net enrolment (NER)			(%) of NER
	M	F	T	M	F	T	
Country wise	787,743	775,027	1,562,770	356,127	354,429	710,556	45.4

Source: Data from National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) [56, p. 32].

**Table 1.** Children's enrolment country wise in year 2016.

Experiences indicate that parents/guardians are not aware of the non-cognitive skills necessary for children's development. They seem to complain when their children are engaging in play and singing and define it like a waste of time. The view indicates that parents perceive learning as just writing, reading, and arithmetic and not for gaining other skills including motor skills, motivational skills, socio-emotional skills, persistence skills, and self-regulation skills. Indications are that the degree of enrolment of young children in ECEC settings countrywide is low compared to the total number of children. For instance, while the statistics from [56] indicates the total population of children aged 4–5 years old expected to be in enrolled in Tanzania by 2016 was 1,562,770, the actual number of enrolled children was only 710,556 (45.4%). **Table 1** below clarifies the situation.

## 6. Conclusion

The analysis of demands for early childhood education and care prompts a few general conclusions. It can be concluded that not only financial investment in ECEC would change the situation, nevertheless there are a number of other related issues such as governance and financial management, cultural issues, socio-economic status, gender discrimination, awareness of parents/guardians and community of the importance of early education investment, and others that need to receive adequate attention as they tend to strengthen each other in a complementary way. Therefore, to improve the situation, it is recommended that there is need for a forging of partnership between the government, parents, and the community in such endeavour; and that government policy-maker should set clear policies regarding how quality ECEC can be equitably funded and conducted throughout the country. All these issues contribute to the ongoing debate on childhood and family policy in Tanzania. The same matters also deserve consideration in specific research projects and innovative practices.

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